

TESTIMONY OF
LESLIE A. HOTALING
ON HER CONFIRMATION AS
DIRECTOR OF THE
DC DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11, 2001

Good evening, Chairperson Schwartz and members of the Committee on Public Works and the Environment. My name is Leslie Hotaling, and I am genuinely thrilled to be here today on the occasion of my confirmation hearing for the position of Director of the District's Department of Public Works.

As you know, I have been with the District government for over 22 years. I came to Washington, DC straight out of graduate school, and am proud to say that I have dedicated my entire professional career -- really my entire adult life -- to the District of Columbia government. To put that into perspective, when I began my career with the DC government, Walter Washington was serving his last three months in office.

And I never in my wildest dreams imagined that one day I would be sitting here being considered for the permanent director of the organization, the people, that I have come to know, love, and respect. I think it's fair to say that, after two decades, I **know** the Department of Public Works. I know its strengths -- I know its weaknesses. And I believe that I am uniquely qualified and highly motivated to assume the leadership of this Department.

In the past few years, I have taken advantage of every opportunity being offered for management and leadership training, in order to better prepare myself for the challenges ahead.

In 1997, I was a graduate of the first class of the Center for Excellence in Municipal Management, the District's partnership with George Washington University. And last winter, I had the opportunity, through GW and the Center for Excellence, to attend Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government. This was three weeks of intense case study work on leadership and what living on the edge, in this pressure cooker, is all about.

The Center for Excellence and Harvard's Kennedy School taught me -- gave me the courage -- to think out of the box. I am grateful to our partners in this program -- GW and the Fannie Mae & Cafritz Foundations -- for their investment in me and the other graduates. The 11th Cohort has just begun. Over 230 District government managers have graduated from the center. You will continue to feel our impact as we employ our newly-honed skills and do our part to transform our city into the nation's crown jewel.

In college I was a math major -- so I have an analytic approach to problem solving. During the first 15 years of my career, I believe that I was one of the best “number 2’s” around -- doing the staff work, policy, procedures, and problem solving to consistently improve performance.

In my first assignment, I served as a management analyst on the team that decriminalized parking violations and created the bureaus of parking enforcement and traffic adjudication. I’m not sure if it’s good news or bad news, but some of the forms I developed in 1979 are still being used today. And, the fleet adjudication program that facilitates the processing of parking tickets for companies with large fleets was my creation.

In the early 1980’s I served on the reorganization team that created the Department of Public Works, and then moved on to work within the public space maintenance administration. Taking on positions of increasing responsibility, I finally became the solid waste administrator in 1995.

Today, I am still looking for better ways, more effective and efficient ways to deliver services to the residents of the District – because if better is possible, then good is not enough.

And after nine months of serving in an interim and acting capacity, I feel prepared to take on the title of director, and all the responsibilities that go with it. My vision for the Department of Public Works has always been one that runs like a fine-tuned machine, one that delivers reliable, consistent, scheduled services, tailored to meet the community needs. I plan to make that vision our city’s reality by working in partnership with the Mayor, City Council, other municipal agencies and an informed residential and commercial constituency.

It is absolutely critical for us, as an organization, to be able to reach out to residents in a meaningful way. That is why, since being named interim director in July, I have focused much of my energy on integrating the District’s neighborhood services initiative – with its cross-agency teams – into DPW’s front-line operations at the neighborhood level. I truly believe that as “we,” and I mean the collective “we,” learn to work together, to solve problems together, that we can indeed achieve a clean DC that we can all be proud of.

Implementation of the neighborhood services initiative is the fulfillment of one of my more recent dreams (some may call them plans). To see front-line employees working across agency lines, engaging residents in the process of taking ownership to solve problems and feeling pride in their successes – that’s what it’s all about. Neighborhood by neighborhood, DPW is making the difference. We must continue to support this new way of doing business, institutionalizing it, and ultimately expanding it to all direct service delivery operations.

Are we prepared to accomplish this? Yes, but not alone. The vision that we’re working towards will take the collaboration of many people, from all of our neighborhoods.

I am not a director who can do the job cooped up in an office at the Reeves Center. Community leaders, ANC commissioners and Council members across the city can tell you that I’m a “regular” at community meetings. This has helped solidify my understanding of what it is going to take to achieve the best cleanliness ratings – 1’s across the board. Not only on the residential

streets, but also the residential alleys, the commercial zones and in industrial locations where environmental crime, particularly illegal dumping is threatening the health and safety of our residents.

After years of hard work, and in collaboration with the efforts of the League of 8000, the leadership of Council member Carol Schwartz, and the commitment of Mayor Anthony Williams, we currently have more new equipment than we have ever had before . We now have new trash packers, street and alley sweepers, snow equipment and litter vacuums. This new equipment is helping us to clean more miles mechanically, and we anticipate, significantly reduce our overtime costs in trash collection operations. I also know that as the expensive, unscheduled overtime is reduced, unscheduled leave will be reduced. DPW employees will be happier and healthier.

What will it take for us to deliver the right combination of responsive, scheduled services to the nation's capital city in the years ahead?

We need the appropriate mix of resources – equipment and people – pulling together, working together, succeeding together. We will need to work with the unions, through labor management partnerships, to help us define and facilitate the changes that make sense for the workforce of the current century.

We must develop systems to reward the efforts of each person that goes the extra mile to keep the promise that we are making to every District resident. People flourish with even the least bit of recognition for their accomplishments.

By way of example, I had the opportunity (my first official act as interim director) to create a simple written acknowledgement of our employees' anniversaries. I now have the honor of signing these letters. The response that I have gotten from some of our long-term employees has brought tears to my eyes. Imagine what would happen if I had the ability to reward with something more than my respect and gratitude for their years of dedication. I look forward to finding the way to accomplish that.

Our employees deserve our respect, and they deserve the opportunity to succeed. We need to continue our commitment to training and skill development. It will help us keep and attract quality people. It makes good business sense. I would ask each of you in authority to take the opportunity to visit our men and women on the frontline at their work site. A little of your time will go a long way to help them remember how important what they do is to this city. I would love the chance to accompany each of you on any field trips that would interest you.

Each neighborhood is unique. Its realities and needs are unique. One size does not fit all when you're trying to keep 67 square miles of city clean.

We are developing the systems – complete with performance measures that will help us manage proactively – systems that will evolve as the city evolves. When we identify the changes in

circumstances sooner, we will react sooner. Responsiveness. We are going for that also. Because we need to.

Try as we may, DPW can't pick up after the District's half million residents by ourselves. We need help from every sector of the city – residents and businesses alike. And I need you, the City Council to help get the word out to your constituents that we appreciate all the help we can get. If we can mobilize even one percent of the population, we will have 5,000 people contributing five minutes a week. With just five minutes a week, we have gotten over 400 human hours of volunteer help and a healthy dose of civic pride spread around. Residents are putting their trash in a can. We're picking it up when they expect us to. Our services are so reliable you can set-your-watch-by-them, take-it-to-the-bank, count-on-'em services. Toward that end, we have developed the "green broom award" pin to hand out to people that we see sweeping, planting flowers – our partners in keeping DC clean. The pin, which I have attached to my testimony, is my gift to you. Please accept it and wear it until you find a citizen to give it away to. Then call me for another one.

In the end, when we all work together to build bridges between the budgetary realities – the operations and legislative requirements and the needs of our residents – we will have the level of programs and services that address everyone's needs. The Council's approval of the increase in parking control aids is a perfect example of a "win," "win," "win" for all. You, the Council give us budgets and laws (and operational oversight when we need it) and in doing this, we will be able to direct significant dollars back into the Department to support the alley cleaning and sweep programs. We could use a few more bridges like that! These program enhancements will go a long way towards customer satisfaction and improving the city's cleanliness and quality of life.

And we will know we have achieved success – cleanliness ratings will go up, complaints will go down, and everyone will be smiling!

In closing,

I am grateful to each member of the City Council for taking time with me – in your offices and on the streets in your wards – to share your views. Those meetings have greatly helped me see your constituents' views of the state of the District's DPW.

In particular, I must thank Council member Schwartz, for her leadership and steadfast support of this agency, even when the riding was rough. I know that you and I will continue to lead the charge, as we take the Department of Public Works to a new level of service.

I have been preparing for this moment since arriving in Washington, DC, 22 years ago. I came here with only two suitcases, a job offer, and much browner hair. As DPW and I grew together, I knew that this place would become my home, these people would become my friends, and this profession would be my life's work. Getting up in the middle of the night to manage snow operations "cured" me of the brown hair years ago!

I really am the luckiest woman in town. Not only did I get to build this agency from the ground up, I may get to assume the directorship just when all the pieces are coming together. I understand that it will be my job to bring them together.

I believe that I am uniquely suited to lead the programs and the people of DPW. I feel strongly about our potential to make this city both lovely and great.

I **want** you to hold us and me directly responsible and completely accountable for our successes, as well as our shortcomings. You always know where to find me – I've been here awhile, and I'm not going anywhere.